



County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

Human Services Council

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DATE: April 1, 2014

TO: Chairman and Members
Board of Supervisors

FROM: Kevin H. Bell, Chairman
Fairfax County Human Services Council

SUBJECT: Recommendations Regarding the FY 2015 Advertised Budget Plan

The Human Services Council appreciates the opportunity to provide comment and guidance on the FY 2015 Advertised Budget Plan. This memorandum to the Board expresses the Human Services Council's views and concerns about the FY 2015 proposed budget and highlights several critical areas for the Board's consideration.

Executive Summary

The Human Services Council endorses the County Executive's recommendation to increase the County's investment in the human services baseline budget by \$8.5 million. After multiple years of flat or reduced funding, this limited funding - approximately 2% of General Fund support for human services - represents a modest but needed step in the right direction. This funding will help the system address growing service needs, case complexity, and workload demands that are rising faster than available resources. Of the \$8.5 million, \$6.9 million is focused in just four critical areas:

- \$2.9 million to sustain human services provided by nonprofits and community organizations
- \$1.7 million to help address significantly increasing public assistance caseloads
- \$1.3 million for support and employment programs for graduates with intellectual disabilities
- \$1.0 million for behavioral health services for youth and families

While the Council reviewed the County Executive's list of possible cuts requested by the Board, the Council strongly recommends that no reductions be made to the proposed \$8.5 million in additional baseline funding. The Council is profoundly concerned about the impact of potential reductions on a human services system already burdened by underinvestment. Our system is struggling to respond adequately to greatly increased needs resulting from the recent economic crisis. The Human Services Council heard and read lengthy testimony on a range of needs including domestic violence services, care management for older adults, integrated health services, school readiness and SACC capacity, and the need for the Board to adopt a long-term funding strategy for meeting the housing blueprint and 10-year plan goals. The Council is also aware of other programs addressing such needs including:

- Opportunity Neighborhoods, which is critical to successful children and youth
- Employment Services to support the Housing Blueprint by integrating employment services into the existing Bridging Affordability framework
- Community Transformation, a prevention program for which federal funding will be discontinued this Fall
- Domestic Violence Action Center (DVAC), a public/private partnership that provides comprehensive services and coordinated access and supports for individuals experiencing domestic violence.

Human Services Challenge: Reduced Resources – Increasing Needs

The Council recognizes that for a number of years, budget decision-making in the County has been extremely difficult, balancing very constrained resources against rising needs. This was particularly true during and for several years after the onset of the Great Recession in 2007-2008. While the local economy has returned to slow, modest growth, unfortunately, we are still grappling with levels of revenue that do not meet the range of needs still evident across the County. In the human services arena, several key statistics clearly demonstrate that needs in the County have not fully recovered from the financial crisis. Since 2007-2008:

- Public Assistance caseloads increased by more than 60%;
- Domestic Violence Survivor Services increased by nearly 30%;
- The County's Medicaid caseload increased by 47%
- The County's average monthly SNAP (food stamps) caseload increased by 126%;
- Between 2007 and 2012, poverty increased almost 31%; as of 2012, over 64,000 County residents are living below the poverty level. More than 172,000 (15.6% of the County residents) are living on income under 200% of poverty (\$44,100 for a family of four). In our schools now approximately 22% of graduating high school seniors and 33% of kindergartners live in poverty.
- Approximately one out of six school-age teenagers have seriously considered suicide in the past year. This translates to about 6,880 youth in those grade levels; and,
- More than 132,000 (12.2%) of County residents do not have health insurance.

This stark rise in human services needs and precarious conditions have adverse impacts across the County – on our schools, public safety and the courts, the County's human services agencies, and on our community partners. In addition to rising demands, the County's human services agencies as well as the nonprofit and community organizations that are a critical part of the human services delivery system have been hit particularly hard by federal budget cuts and sequestration. Simultaneously, our nonprofit partners have experienced marked declines in private charitable support, restricting their ability to respond to the increased service demands.

Comment on the County Executive's Budget

The Human Services Council appreciates County Executive Edward L. Long's commitment to an effective safety net of human services. In light of the County's growing human service needs, the Council recommends that the Board of Supervisors accept the County Executive's proposed \$8.5 million increase in the human services system, with additional funding beyond that recommended for information technology improvements and new facilities. These investments are warranted and necessary. The Council recognizes that the County Executive has taken a measured and thoughtful approach in his multi-year budgeting strategy; however, the Council is concerned about the impact of potential cuts and deferrals on the human services system.

The Human Services Council assessed the FY 2015 Advertised Budget Plan with regard to its effect on the seven strategic focus areas that guide the work of the human services system. These focus areas are consistent with the Board's priorities in that they describe what success will look like as a result of the County's efforts to protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods, and diverse communities of Fairfax County.

The human services system's resources are strained, limiting significantly the ability to respond to increasing service requirements. While community needs, caseloads, and participation levels are rising at an alarming rate, General Fund support of human services has not kept pace since FY 2008. This situation results in unmet needs and creates risk across the community. After many years of severely restricted funding for human services agencies and the County's nonprofit partners, the limited investments in the FY 2015 Advertised Budget are certainly appreciated, but are just a small step, although an important one, in the right direction.

After a thorough review of the FY 2015 General Fund budget, the Council's budget recommendations for the human services system are detailed in Attachment A.

The Human Services Council notes that \$2.1 million for various document imaging and case management projects within the Department of Family Services affecting children and families is on the County Executive's March 18, 2014 list of potential reductions for FY 2015. The explanation therein states that this funding could be reduced from the proposed budget because sufficient balances *may* be identified at year end to fund the requirements. The Council has serious concerns about such uncertainty and requests that (i) such funding be identified before any reduction action is considered and (ii) that such funding not be taken from other budgeted items within the human services system, if sufficient balances are not realized and identified at FY 2014 year end. These projects cannot be deferred without adversely affecting the system.

Voices From the Community

As part of its mission, the Fairfax County Human Services Council is charged with providing feedback to the Board of Supervisors on resources provided in support of the human services system. In order to fulfill its charge, the Council sought input from the community regarding specific concerns about the advertised budget and its impact on the effectiveness of human services funded by the County.

The community provided the Council a detailed understanding of the array of programs, service gaps, long-term needs, and results of the County's investments in human services necessary to support the Board's goals and vision for the County. These efforts prepared Council members to advise the Board regarding human services needs and the impact of reductions affecting efforts across the system. If requested, the Council can provide the Board of Supervisors copies of the abundant written testimony.

The Council wants to bring to the attention of the Board of Supervisors the information received about specific human services needs which will have budgetary implications for FY 2015 and beyond. The Council heard testimony raising concerns about investing \$1.1 million of funding in the Inova Translational Medicine Institute. Based on that testimony, the Council recommends that the Board of Supervisors defer this funding for FY 2015 while it reviews the return on the County's financial investment. In addition, a number of community voices discussed domestic violence and the need to continue funding to support the Domestic Violence Action Center (DVAC) beyond FY 2015. The Human Services Council supports the County Executive's inclusion of funding in FY 2016 in his multi-year budget plan to continue the DVAC program. The DVAC program demonstrates a successful service model that could be replicated in other human services programs. While the Council is not recommending any immediate action from the Board on this item, the Council urges the Board to be vigilant about the needs addressed through the DVAC program and requests the opportunity to discuss them with the Board after completion of the FY 2015 budget process as they will have financial implications for FY 2016 and beyond.

Conclusion

The Council fully supports the County Executive's original funding recommendations. They will help begin to address the rising needs discussed in this document and by others from the human services system. These needs are supported by data and the experiences of our community's residents. The Council urges you to remember that the funding Fairfax County devotes to human services is a wise and prudent investment, helping to prevent the need for far more costly actions in the future. Moreover, such funding supports services that help to secure a quality of life that Fairfax County residents want and deserve. The Human Services Council appreciates the thoughtful and considerate actions of the Board of Supervisors who, along with its many stakeholders, commit to working on behalf of the best interests of the Fairfax County community. The Council looks forward to meeting with the Board's Budget Committee on April 1, 2014.

cc: Human Services Council Members
Edward L. Long, Jr., County Executive
Patricia D. Harrison, Deputy County Executive

Susan W. Datta, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Management and Budget
Human Services Department Directors